

NIHR Research Delivery Network Strategy and Service Development Stakeholder Briefing 4

The NIHR Research Delivery Network (RDN) is engaging with stakeholders to support the effective development of our services. This is the fourth briefing in our current engagement series, aimed at fostering collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement in research delivery.

Each briefing has concentrated on a specific strategic aim and its impact on research delivery. In December 2024, we examined Strategic Aim 1, which emphasised the efficient and inclusive delivery of research, ensuring participant support across the health and social care system. This included exploring how to balance support for established research organizations while strengthening capacity in newer or less research-active sites.

In January 2025, we examined Strategic Aims 4 and 5, looking at ways to better support sponsors and researchers, improve study efficiency, adopt novel delivery methods, and align with the UK's Life Sciences vision for economic growth. These aims are critical to strengthening research delivery, advancing innovation, and ensuring the UK remains a global leader in the field.

A summary of feedback from the December 2024 engagement is available [here](#) (and attached), with relevant insights contributing to the service design process. Feedback from the January 2025 engagement will be summarised and included in the next scheduled briefing.

Purpose of this round of engagement

This engagement round focuses on developing a [national funding model](#) that promotes consistency and strategic alignment across the health and care system. Its goal is to shape the future approach to RDN funding distribution, ensuring effective support for research delivery across the country.

Following a review of various reports (including the government's Growth and Health Mission within the 10-year health plan and *Saving and Improving Lives: The Future of Clinical Research* alongside survey findings and engagement feedback), we have identified key themes and combined these with the contractual expectations of the RDN:

- Inconsistent regional funding and management, leading to challenges in delivering research equitably across the UK.
- Limited opportunities for growth in less research-mature organisations, restricting their ability to build capacity and capability.
- Diverse perspectives on the most appropriate drivers for funding, with debate over equity vs. activity-based models, inclusion and strategic growth in capacity and capability, deprivation and other factors.
- Lack of flexibility and the ability to pivot resources.
- Suboptimal in-year allocations, such as contingency funding, which, while reactive, may not be the most effective long-term approach.
- Complex and bureaucratic governance processes, creating inefficiencies in funding distribution and reporting.

We are seeking your input on the following high-level principles that will shape the next phase of work on the RDN funding model. Establishing these principles will help create a framework for ongoing engagement and inform future funding model options.

The RDN funding model should:

- Establish a nationally consistent financial model across all 12 RRDNs, reducing regional disparities.
- Enable long-term planning by providing advance notice of RDN funding allocations.
- Evolve over time to reflect changes in the research portfolio, health and care services, and broader system needs.
- Support the delivery of the RDN's [five strategic aims](#) while ensuring predictability in funding for well-established research institutions.
- Align with the government's three key strategic priorities:
 - Shifting care from hospitals to community settings.
 - Leveraging technology to enhance health and care services.
 - Prioritizing prevention over treatment.
- Encourage collaboration across the research system.
- Implement proportionate and efficient financial oversight and reporting processes.
- Support the development of methods to assess value for money and the impact of RDN investments.

Your insights will play a vital role in shaping a funding model that meets the needs of the entire research delivery system. We will continue engaging with you through various channels in the coming months to ensure a collaborative and transparent approach.

What would we like from you?

We want to hear your thoughts on these principles and invite you to complete this brief [survey](#). It offers you an opportunity to reflect on your thoughts and provide valuable input on the strategic aims and user needs. The survey will be open until the 10th March.